

AN
ACCOUNT
OF THE
HUNTING EXCURSIONS
OF
ASOPH UL DOULAH,

Visier of the Mogul Empire, and Nabob of Oude.

By WILLIAM BLANE, Esq;
Who attended in these Excursions in the Years
1785 and 1786.

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A C C O U N T
OF THE
HUNTING EXCURSIONS
OF
ASOPH UL DOULAH.

THE Vizier always sets out upon his annual hunting party as soon as the cold season is well set in; that is, about the beginning of December; and he stays out till the heats, about the beginning of March, force him back again. During this time, he generally makes a circuit of country from four to six hundred miles always bending his course towards the skirts of the Northern Mountains, where

the country, being wild and uncultivated, is the most proper for game.

When he marches, he takes with him, not only his household and Zenana, but all his Court, and a great part of the inhabitants of his capital. Besides the immediate attendants about his person, in the various capacities of Rhidmitgars, Frashes, Chobdars, Harcaras, Mewatics, &c. which may amount to about two thousand, he is attended in camp by five or six hundred horse, and several battalions of regular sepoys, with their field-pieces. He takes with him about four or five hundred elephants; of these some are broke in for riding, some for fighting, some carry baggage, and the rest are reserved for clearing the jungles and forests of the game: of the first kind, there are always twenty or thirty ready caparisoned, with *Howdahs* and *Amarys*, that attend close behind the one he rides upon himself, that he may change occasionally to any of them he likes; or he sometimes permits some of his attendants

to ride upon them. He has with him about five or six hundred sumpter horses, a great many of which are always led ready saddled near him; many of them are beautiful Persian horses, and some of them of the Arabian breed; but he seldom rides any of them. Of wheel carriages, there are a great many of the country fashion drawn by bullocks, principally for the accommodation of the women; besides which, he has with him a couple of English chaises, a buggy or two, and sometimes a chariot; but all these, like the horses, are merely for show, and never used; indeed, he seldom uses any other conveyance but an elephant, or sometimes, when fatigued or indisposed, a palanquin, of which several attend him.

The arms he carries with him are a vast number of matchlocks—a great many English pieces of various kinds—pistols (of which he is very fond), a great number, perhaps forty or fifty pairs—bows and arrows—besides swords, sabres, and daggers innumerable.

numerable. One or more of all these different kinds of arms he generally has upon the elephant with him, and a great many more are carried in readiness by his attendants.

The animals he carries for sport are dogs, principally greyhounds, of which he has about three hundred—hawks, of various kinds, at least two hundred—a few trained leopards, called *Cheetabs*, for catching deer—and to this list I may add a great many marksmen, whose profession is to shoot deer—and fowlers who provide game; for there are none of the natives of India who have any idea of shooting game with small shot, or of hunting with flow hounds. He is also furnished with nets of various kinds, some for quail, and others very large, for fishing, which are carried along with him upon elephants, attended by fishermen, so as to be always ready to be thrown into any river or lake he may meet with on the march.

Besides

Besides this catalogue for the sport, he carries with him every article of luxury or pleasure; even ice is transported along with him to cool his water, and make ices; and a great many carts are loaded with the Ganges water, which is esteemed the best and lightest in India, for his drink. The fruits of the season, and fresh vegetables, are sent to him daily from his gardens to whatever distance he may go, by laid bearers, stationed upon the road at the distance of every ten miles, and in this manner convey whatever is sent by them at the rate of four miles an hour, night and day. Besides the fighting elephants, which I have mentioned, he has with him fighting antelopes, fighting buffaloes, and fighting rams, in great numbers: and lastly, of the feathered kind (besides hawks), he carries with him several hundred pigeons, some fighting cocks, and an endless variety of nightingales, parrots, minos, &c. all of which are carried along with his tents.

What I have hitherto enumerated are the appendages of the Nabob personally;
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besides which, there is a large public Bazar, or, in other words, a moving town, attends his camp, consisting of shopkeepers and artificers of all kinds, money-changers, dancing women, &c. &c.; so that, upon the most moderate calculation, the number of souls in his camp cannot be reckoned at less than twenty thousand.

There are generally about twenty or thirty of the gentlemen of his Court, who attend him on his hunting parties, and are the companions of his sports and pleasures. They are principally his own relations in different degrees of consanguinity; and such as are not related to him, are of the old respectable families of Hindostan, who either have Jaghires, or are otherwise supported by the Nabob: all of these are obliged to keep a small establishment of elephants for the sake of attending the Nabob; besides horses, a palanquin, &c.

The Nabob, and all the gentlemen of his camp, are provided with double sets of tents and camp equipage, which are always sent

sent on the day before to the place whither he intends going, which is generally about eight or ten miles in whatever direction he expects most game; so that by the time he has finished his sport in the morning, he finds the whole camp ready pitched for his reception.

His Highness always rises before day-break, and after using the hot bath, he eats an English breakfast of tea and toast, which is generally over by the time the day is well broke. He then mounts his elephant, attended by all his household and *Swary*, and preceded by some musicians on horseback, singing, and playing on musical instruments. He proceeds forwards, and is presently joined, from the different quarters of the camp, by the gentlemen of his Court, who having paid their respects, fall in upon their elephants on each side of, or behind, the Nabob's, so as to form a regular moving Court or Durbar; and in this manner they march on conversing together, and looking out for game. A great many dogs are led before, and are constantly picking up hares,

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foxes, jackalls, and sometimes deer. The hawks are also carried immediately before the elephants, and are let fly at whatever game is sprung for them, which generally consists of partridges, in great numbers and varieties, quails, bustards, and different kinds of herons, which last give excellent sport with the falcons, or sharp-winged hawks. The Nabob takes great pains in ranging the elephants in a regular line, which is very extensive, and by proceeding in this manner no game can escape. The horse are generally at a little distance upon the wings, but small parties of three or four horsemen are placed in the intervals of, or before the elephants, in order to ride after the hawks, and assist the dogs when loosed at deer; or very often the horsemen run down what we call the *bog-deer*, without any dogs. Wild boars are sometimes started, and are either shot or run down by the dogs and horsemen.

When intelligence is brought of a tyger, it is matter of great joy, as that is considered as the principal sport, and all the

rest only occasional to fill up the time. Preparations are instantly made for pursuing him, which is done by assembling all the elephants, with as many people as can conveniently go upon their backs, and leaving all the rest, whether on foot or on horseback, behind. The elephants are then formed into a line, and proceed forward regularly; the Nabob and all his attendants having their fire-arms in readiness. The cover, in which the tyger is most frequently found, is long grass, or reeds so high as often to reach above the elephants, and it is very difficult to find him in such a place, as he either endeavours to steal off, or lies so close that he cannot be roused till the elephants are almost upon him. He then roars and skulks away, but is shot at as soon as he can be seen; and it is generally contrived, in compliment to the Nabob, that he shall have the first shot at him. If he is not disabled, he continues skulking away, the line of elephants following him, and the Nabob and others shooting at him as often as he can be seen, till he falls.

Sometimes, when he can be traced to a particular spot where he couches, the elephants are formed into a circle round him, and in that case, when he is roused, he generally attacks the elephant that is nearest to him, by springing upon him with a dreadful roar, and biting at, or tearing him with his claws: but in this case, from his being obliged to shew himself, he is soon dispatched by the number of shots aimed at him; for the greatest difficulty is to rouse him, and get a fair view of him. The elephants all this time are dreadfully frightened, shrieking and roaring in a manner particularly expressive of their fear: and this they begin as soon as they smell him, or hear him growl, and generally endeavour to turn back from the place where the tyger is: some of them, however, but very few, are bold enough to be driven up to attack him, which they do by curling the trunk close up under the mouth, and then charging the tyger with their tusks; or they endeavour to press him to death by falling on him with their knees, or treading him under

under their feet. If one tyger is killed, it is considered as a good day's sport; but sometimes two or three are killed in one day, or even more, if they meet with a female and her cubs. The Nabob then proceeds towards his tents upon the new ground, so that every day is both a marching day and a day of sport; or sometimes he halts for a day or two upon a place that he likes, but not often. When he gets to his tents, which is generally about eleven or twelve o'clock, he dines, and goes to sleep for an hour or two. In the afternoon he mounts his elephant again, and takes a circuit about the skirts of the camp, with the dogs and hawks; or sometimes amuses himself with an elephant fight, with shooting at a mark, or such like amusements; and this course he repeats every day infallibly during the whole of the party.

The other principal objects of the Nabob's sport are, wild elephants, buffaloes, and rhinoceros.

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I was present two years ago at the chase of a wild elephant of prodigious size and strength. The plan first followed, was to endeavour to take him alive by the assistance of the tame elephants, who try to surround him, whilst he was kept at bay by fire-works, such as crackers, porte-fires, &c. but he always got off from them, notwithstanding the drivers upon some of the tame elephants got so near as to throw nooses of very strong ropes over his head, and endeavoured to detain him by fastening them round trees, but he snapped them like packthread, and held on his way towards the forest. The Nabob then ordered some of the strongest and most furious of his fighting elephants to be brought up to him. As soon as one of them came near him, he turned and charged him with dreadful fury; so much so, that in the struggle with one of them, he broke one of his tusks by the middle, and the broken piece (which was upwards of two inches in diameter, of solid ivory) flew up in the air several yards above their heads. Having repelled the attacks of the
 saw I fighting

fighting elephants, he pursued his way with a slow and sullen pace towards his cover. The Nabob then seeing no possibility of taking him alive, gave orders for killing him. An incessant fire from match-locks was immediately commenced upon him from all quarters, but with little effect, for he twice turned round and charged the party. In one of these charges he struck obliquely upon the elephant which the * Prince rode, and threw him on his side, but fortunately passed on without offering farther injury to him. The Prince, by laying hold of the Howdah, kept himself in his seat, but the servant he had behind, and every thing he had with him on the Howdah, was thrown off to a great distance. At last, our grisly enemy was overpowered by the number of bullets showered upon him from all sides, and he fell dead, after having received, as was computed, upwards of one thousand

* This Prince was the Shaw Zadah eldest son to the Great Mogul, who had at this time taken refuge with the Vizier from the persecution of his father's ministers.

balls in his body: he had carried us a chace of eight or ten miles after him, and afforded us sport from morning till twelve o'clock. The following year the Nabob took fifteen wild elephants at once. They had wandered up a narrow valley in the mountains, which was terminated by inaccessible precipices, and when they had got to the end of it, the country people threw up a strong rampart of trees, stones, earth, &c. across the valley behind them, and confined them in it. After having been much reduced by hunger, they were all taken alive, by letting in the tame elephants amongst them.

The hunting the wild buffaloe is also performed by shooting him from elephants; but he runs so fast that it is very difficult to get up with him, and as there are no dogs who will attack him, the horsemen are sent after him to endeavour to stop or turn him, but they dare not venture near, as he runs at them, and can easily toss a horse with his horns, if he comes within his reach: but when he can by any means be retarded, so

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as to let the elephants come up, he is soon dispatched by the match-lock: some of the buffaloes are of prodigious size and strength, and have an uncommonly wild and furious look, and they are so formidable in the jungles, that it is said even the largest royal tyger never ventures to attack them.

I have never seen the rhinoceros hunted, although there are many of them on the route the Nabob goes; but they generally keep to the thick forests where it is impossible to follow them. When they can be got at, they are pursued upon elephants and shot; but it is both more difficult and dangerous than any other sport, for even the elephant is not safe against him; for if he charges an elephant and rips him with his horn, he generally kills him on the spot; and except his eyes or temples, and a small part of his breast before the shoulder, he is invulnerable to the largest musquet ball in every other part of his body.

When the Prince is with the Nabob upon the party, the etiquette observed in regard to

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him, is this: as soon as the Nabob is mounted, he goes in front of the Prince's tent, and there waits till he is ready; as soon as his Royal Highness comes out of his tent, the Vizier pays his obeisance by making his elephant kneel down, and then makes three *salams* to him. The Prince is then mounted upon his elephant, which is made to advance about eight or ten paces in front of the Nabob and the rest of the party, and in that station he marches on. When they arrive at the new camp, the Nabob attends him to the door of his tent, and then takes his leave; and this form he repeats regularly twice every day.

As you may be curious to know how I dispose of myself in the party, I shall briefly mention it. I generally have two or three elephants of my own well caparisoned, and a double set of tents, one of which is always sent on with the Nabob's, so that I am entirely independent in respect to my equipage; and as both the Persian and Indostan languages are familiar to me, I mix a good deal in conversation
with

with the Nabob and the gentlemen about him, and conform myself as much as possible to their manners and customs; and although I am desirous of being considered entirely on an equal footing with the native gentlemen about the court, yet the Vizier generally shews me particular marks of attention, by making me ride close to himself.

EXPLANATION of LOCAL WORDS.

Amary.—The machine fastened upon the back of the elephant for riding in. It is generally made of wood, painted and gilded. It is of a square form, with ledges about eight inches high, and in two divisions, the largest before, and a small one behind for a servant; the first division is from three to four feet wide, with cushions and bedding in it; and the whole is covered by a canopy, supported with eight standards, and covered with English broad cloth, either plain or embroidered.

Howdah.

Howdah.—The same as an amary, but without a canopy.

Rbidmitgar.—A footman, or valet-de-chambre.

Harcara.—A servant employed for messages, and to procure intelligence.

Chobdar.—A servant who carries a silver mace in front of the procession, who attends at the door to announce strangers and visitors, and who is sent upon messages of ceremony.

Mewatics.—A sect of Hindostan soldiers, principally employed as guards.

Frasbes.—Servants whose business is to pitch tents in the field, and in the house to spread the carpets, &c. and keep the apartments clean.

Zenanab.—The Seraglio.

Jungle.—Desert and uncultivated places, whether covered with long grass or reeds, or with brush-wood, or forests.

F I N I S.

